Developing Self-Advocacy Skills

Self-advocacy skills are important for everyone. Self-advocacy is simply acting on your own behalf without using a third party to negotiate outcomes. These skills are valuable in both the study environment and the workforce. Sounds simple! In fact, self-advocacy can be quite intimidating mostly due to lack of confidence, uncertainty about how to progress a negotiation and sometimes a power imbalance between the parties involved in the negotiations. The DSC works to support students in developing self-advocacy skills and encourages students to see the University as an environment where these skills can be honored.

*Being effective in advocating for yourself can be aided by:*

- **Understanding your rights**—having an appreciation of what is reasonable to request from both a disability perspective (e.g. the ADA) and from a student perspective.
- **Knowing what you need (not just what you want)**— these are two different things. The University will seek to provide reasonable adjustments to accommodate the impact of your disability but there are numerous factors that help determine whether an adjustment is reasonable. Be prepared to consider other methods that may meet your needs even if it is not exactly what you wanted. *Be willing to compromise*—goodwill and an ability to be flexible are important.
- **Knowing who and where to go for support**— Understanding who you should talk to and when it is best to bring your issue to the attention of others. Thinking through your request can assist in identifying whom to speak with and when is the best time to do so.
- **Managing your disability-related needs**— Understanding that arranging accommodations is a *collaborative* effort. While DSC is happy to arrange and provide accommodations, it is the responsibility of the student to request those accommodations in a timely manner.
- **Anticipating your needs in each class**— By anticipating what you will need, you can determine what services you would need to request from DSC or your instructor.

If you ever feel unsure about how to go about advocating for yourself, please don’t hesitate to stop by the DSC to meet with a counselor who can work with you on developing these skills. Developing these skills is important not just for disability-related needs, but for life in general!